

Sales through service creates a **swell of customer compliments** for Manx Telecom





Deregulation of the local fixed and mobile telephony market has caused many changes in recent years.

"Like BT on the UK mainland more than a decade earlier, 2006 marked a watershed for our business, as we came under increased scrutiny as a result of new entrants to our core market for the first time," confirms HR director, John McChesney, Manx Telecom.

Previously part of the international telecommunications giant, Telefonica S.A which includes the Telefonica O2 Europe Group, Manx Telecom remains the Isle of Man's largest telecommunications and Internet provider. The company employs 310 staff and today offers a full range of fixed line, mobile and data services to the island's businesses and consumers as well as developing significant off-island business.

As part of a broader drive to reinforce its total brand proposition in this new competitive environment, Manx Telecom turned to behaviour change specialist, Huthwaite International, to review and enhance the performance of its sales and customer service teams. *"Much of Manx Telecom's historic success has been as an innovative local business which understands the needs of our local customers,"* says McChesney. *"All that said, we saw that in such a sophisticated and price-sensitive environment, we needed to reinforce and heighten our customer-focused approach if we were to maintain our premier market position on the Isle of Man."*

"In working with Huthwaite International we are putting in place a more proactive sales and service process that not only meets but exceeds expectations, by building real value for our customers and the business."

First impressions last

Manx Telecom had previous positive experience of Huthwaite's evidence-based approach and was confident that the company could provide a tailored training solution to meet its complex requirements. Identified as a priority for development were the sales and service teams dealing with customers across multiple touch-points - from B2B and B2C telephone sales and retail store teams through to customer service, billing and directory enquiries.

In order to assess current performance and skills gaps, the Huthwaite team carried out a thorough needs assessment, via observations, interviews with senior staff and employees and management workshops. *"First impressions are very important in a commoditised environment such as telecoms, where most sales can be won or lost on the first interaction,"* believes Huthwaite senior consultant, Claire Cologne. As a result, good customer service is absolutely central to customer loyalty and retention.

Huthwaite's analysis found that staff knew their products and services well and performed strongly when giving technical advice. To build on those strengths, Huthwaite recommended using persuasive behaviours such as probing customer needs - especially with

regard to add-ons and upgrades - and making recommendations. This would enable teams to identify customers' needs and create value for Manx Telecom solutions.

"This reinforced our own findings," recalls McChesney. *"As part of our ongoing service programme, we have customer compliments and complaints monitoring, regular satisfaction surveys and a customer council representing all customer-facing teams. From this we had strong evidence of what users valued in our service. It also pointed to other areas where we could improve, such as minimising the use of jargon and always ensuring follow-up."*

Common skills

As a result, both companies agreed that all staff needed to adopt a more proactive approach in managing interactions as the basis of delivering a consistently high quality customer experience.

To keep the customer experience central to all interactions between Manx Telecom's staff and its customers, the solutions developed by Huthwaite needed to be uniform in language and approach.

"As our best practice skills models are behaviour-based, they are highly appropriate across different customer interfaces," says Cologne. *"This meant that we were able to develop just two programmes - Delivering Excellent Customer Service and Selling Skills - to ensure consistent delivery across all customer touch points."*

...Manx Telecom continues to hit ambitious customer retention and business growth targets.

Firstly, the Selling Skills programme was attended by cross-functional groups of sellers: this enabled them to not only develop skills but also to improve their understanding of the other sales teams' roles.

This took the form of intensive two-day training programmes which included role-plays designed to replicate closely the everyday environments in which the sales teams operated. In addition, a series of coaching programmes were put in place to enable managers to provide ongoing feedback and reinforcement to help sellers apply their new skills at work.

As a result of the success of this initiative, earlier this year a parallel programme was developed and implemented for Manx Telecom's customer service teams - in the areas of billing, complaints and help desk – with exceptional customer feedback.

Measurable benefits

This 'sales through service' approach has also helped Manx Telecom maximise sales opportunities as it builds value for its customers. In recognising that sales and service are not totally unconnected functions but part of a 'sales service continuum', it enables and encourages all those interacting in whatever way with customers to help spot and develop sales opportunities.

The continuous training and reinforcement initiative, which is closely aligned with Manx Telecom's broader service improvement strategy, is already delivering the desired level of change across the business.

For Sarah Creighton, manager of retail operations, *"the main area in which we have seen improvement is in the quality and quantity of questioning and the move away from 'feature dumping' to benefit selling. This is reinforced by the much higher scores we achieve on our video 'mystery shop',"* she confirms, *"in which all members of the team come across as much more consistent in the structure of their interactions with customers."*

Customer support manager, Tracey Brennan agrees and adds: *"We are well aware that in many cases there are alternative providers for the products and services we offer and so customer service excellence is key to ensuring our customers come back to us. In the support area this means ensuring that the customer goes away with the right solution first time, every time."*

"Using the Huthwaite framework it is much easier for the team to achieve this first time resolve, as by empathising, checking understanding and active listening you are more likely to provide the most appropriate solution, whilst providing great customer service along the way."

The latest customer service scores too reflect the positive impact of the Huthwaite 'Living Sales™' philosophy, which places sales and service at the heart of the business: for the first time, the number of customer compliments has overtaken the number of complaints and Manx Telecom's customer satisfaction scores are the best across the whole of the Telefónica 02 Europe Group. How many other telecoms providers could say the same?

It's no surprise to hear that Manx Telecom continues to hit ambitious customer retention and business growth targets. *"This is no coincidence,"* believes McChesney.

"These programmes have been successful in delivering internal and external customer-facing benefits, in keeping existing customers and attracting back those who have switched to newer competitors. Our greatest potential weapon is our outstanding level of service – skills we have honed with the help of Huthwaite International - our customer compliments speak for themselves."

"We have been helped by a Huthwaite team that 'practices what it preaches'" says McChesney. *"From day one we have been impressed with the whole company's professionalism, in taking time to understand our business challenges. They have brought an objective and challenging tenacity to developing effective improvement programmes and have delivered them in a credible and stimulating way which has secured real buy-in at all levels of our organisation."*





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